

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY JIDDA

USINT HAVANA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY BONN

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOGADISCIO 0158

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: MOPS, ET, SO

SUBJ: SOMALI DEFENSIVE SUCCESSES GAIN TEMPORARY RESPITE

1. DURING A DISCUSSION OF THE MILITARY SITUATION IN THE OGADEN WITH EGYPTIAN MILITARY ATTACHE COL AHMED MOHMOUD ABDEL HALIM ON JAN 25, THE LATTER REPORTED HIS CONTACTS IN THE SOMALI DEFENSE MINISTRY WERE GREATLY RELIEVED THAT THE ETHIOPIAN ATTACK ON JAN 22-23 WAS REPULSED. ACCORDING TO HALIM, SOMALI FORCES LEARNED OF THE EFFORT VIA COMMUNICATION INTERCEPTS BEFORE THE ATTACK WAS LAUNCHED, POSITIONED THEMSELVES TO MEET THE MAIN THRUST WHICH WAS SOUTH FROM HARAR, AND WERE ABLE TO COUNTER ATTACK AS SOON AS THE ETHIOPIAN MOMENTUM HAD EXHAUSTED ITSELF ON

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THE MORNING OF JAN 23. HALIM SAID THE ATTACK WHICH BEGAN LATE IN THE AFTERNOON OF THE 22ND CONTINUED THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT SUPPORTED BY AIR COVER; THE PLANES DROPPING FLARES TO PIN POINT TARGETS. THE ETHIOPIAN INFANTRY EXHAUSTED ITSELF IN THE ATTEMPTED BREAK THROUGH, AND RETREATED AS SOON AS THE SOMALIS LAUNCHED COUNTERATTACKS. THIS ACTION UNCOVERED THE CUBAN ARTILLERY UNIT WHICH WAS SUBSEQUENTLY ROUTED WITH CAPTIVES TAKEN.

2. CONTINUING HIS NARRATION, HALIM SAID HE DID NOT KNOW THE STRENGTH OF THE SOMALI FORCES WHICH HAD ENTERED HARAR, BUT HE DOUBTED THEY WERE IN SUFFICIENT STRENGTH TO STAY THERE BARRING A GENERAL COLLAPSE OF THE ETHIOPIAN FORCES WHICH HE THOUGHT UNLIKELY. HE WOULD NOT SAY WHETHER THE SOMALIS COULD TAKE THE CITY, BUT HE EXPLAINED THAT THE BBMALI COMMAND WAS WARY OF ENTRAPMENT, AND

WOULD PROCEED ONLY WITH GREAT CAUTION. HE FELT THE OUTCOME OF THE LATEST FIGHTING WAS A REFLECTION OF TROOP MORALE MORE THAN ANY OTHER SINGLE FACTOR. HE SPECULATED THAT THE WEIGHT OF MATERIAL ADVANTAGE STEADILY ACCURING TO THE ETHIOPIANS WAS EVENTUALLY BOUND TO TURN THE TIDE, AND WARNED THAT OBSERVERS MUST NOT BE MISLEAD BY EARLY SOMALI SUCCESSES. HE ADDED THAT THE SOMALI LOGISTICAL PICTURE WAS STILL CHAOTIC WITH NO SHORT TERM PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVEMENT. HE AGAIN ASSERTED THAT THE BULK OF THE SOMALI NATIONAL ARMY WAS IN THE HARAR AREA, AND SAID THAT IF DEFEATED OR CUT OFF THERE, THERE WAS NO POSSIBILITY OF THE SOMALIS OFFERING ANY SIGNIFICANT RESISTANCE ANYWHERE ELSE.

3. TURNING TO THE POSSIBILITY OF AN ATTACK ON SOMALIA BY SEA, HALIM RECITED A LIST OF SHIPS IN THE ETHIOPIAN NAVAL INVENTORY. WHEN QUESTIONED AS TO OPERATIONAL STATE, OR ABILITY TO MAKE A SUSTAINED EFFORT ON THE BASIS OF THAT FORCE, HE SAID THAT OF COURSE ANY SIGNIFICANT EFFORT WOULD REQUIRE SOVIET UNITS AS WELL, SUPPORT WHICH IN HIS OPINION THE SOVIETS MIGHT BE WILLING

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TO GIVE IN ORDER TO PROTECT THEIR INVESTMENT IN ETHIOPIA.

4. COMMENT: AS USUAL HALIM WAS ABLE TO MAKE A BETTER CASE FOR THE SOMALIS THAN THEY ARE FOR THEMSELVES. HIS INFORMATION IS MORE OBJECTIVE THAN THE WSLF ANDHANAB REPORTS. HE BELIEVES THE SOMALIS ARE DOING REASONABLY WELL UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. HE ALSO BELIEVES TIME IS RUNNING OUT ON THEM, REGARDLESS OF THEIR SHORT TERM SUCCESSES.

VOUGHT

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